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DRAMATURGICAL INTERPRETATION OF ORCHESTRA AND SOLO HARMONY IN P.I. TCHAIKOVSKY'S 1-ST PIANO CONCERT

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Abstract

Purpose: “Piano Concerto No. 1 in B minor, Op. 23” is a work that represents an important stage in the development of the concert genre of the Romantic era, in which the traditions of the classical ensemble are combined with the principles of symphonicism of the new era. In this concert, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky takes the relationship between the soloist and the orchestra out of the traditional model of competition and raises it to the level of symphonic cooperation.

Methods: The tonal and intonational features of the heroic theme presented by the orchestra in the introduction form the ideological basis of the dramaturgy of the entire work. The piano part, on the other hand, performs not only a virtuoso solo function, but also appears as a thematic and developing factor on an equal footing with the orchestral texture.

Results: The results of the scientific analysis show that the ensemble balance, agogic freedom, and dynamic contrasts in the work require a high level of creative collaboration between the soloist and the conductor.

Originality/Value: The work shows the transformation of the sonata-allegro form, the expansion of tonal dramaturgy, the system of motivic connections, and the methods of symphonic development. In this regard, the concerto is a vivid example of the implementation of the aesthetics of romantic symphony within the framework of the concert genre.

Keywords: *piano concerto, romantic symphonism, ensemble culture, solo and orchestral relationship, sonata-allegro form, tonal dramaturgy, motivic development, symphonic thinking, agogics, dynamic contrast*

Introduction

“As our President Shavkat Mirziyoyev noted, “If culture and art live, the nation and people, all of humanity, live peacefully”. From this perspective, the study and analysis of the masterpieces of world musical culture, in particular the legacy of P. I. Tchaikovsky, is of particular importance

in the spiritual development of the younger generation...”

“As pianist AV Gavrilov noted, Tchaikovsky’s Piano Concerto No. 1 is a masterpiece that is familiar and recognized by everyone, from peasants to kings. This concerto went down in history as the first piano concerto by a Russian composer to achieve internation-

al success” (URL: https://www.belcanto.ru/tchaikovsky_concerto1.html).

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky’s Piano Concerto No. 1 in B flat minor, Op. 23, is one of the pinnacles of world musical culture, and its famous Introduction is of revolutionary significance in the history of symphonic dramaturgy and piano performance. This Introduction is not only the prelude to the work, but also the monumental foundation that defines the substantive and emotional basis of the entire composition.

“Piano Concerto No. 1 in B minor, Op. 23” the opening movement of the work is built on the principles of romantic symphony, demonstrating dramatic breadth, thematic contrast, and a complex ensemble relationship between orchestra and soloist. Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky composed this concerto in 1874–1875 and structured the opening movement as an independent symphonic episode, different from the usual sonata-allegro exposition. Although the work begins in the key of B minor, the opening theme sounds in the key of D-flat major, which provides the tonal dramatism and wide emotional palette characteristic of romantic music.

In the introduction, the orchestra, especially the horn and strings, presents a broad, heroic theme; in this theme, a sense of grandeur and inner strength is created through march-like movement and wide interval leaps. “Tchaikovsky presents his structural musical material naturally and lyrically, as if by voluntary inspiration, but at the same time it is highly planned and calculated. The main melody in the introduction contains the most important motivic core elements for the entire work... The themes of the three movements are delicately and deeply intertwined... Although Tchaikovsky presents his structural material naturally and lyrically, it is largely thought out and precisely calculated” (Michael Steinberg. 1998).

The piano, on the other hand, performs not a soloist’s predominance in the first act, but a harmonic and rhythmic support function: it enriches the orchestral text with strong chords and arpeggios and strengthens its timbral breadth. As noted in scientific analyses, this situation temporarily softens the traditional “soloist-orchestra opposition” in the concert genre, harmonizing them as

a single symphonic texture. In this respect, the introduction evokes an aesthetic impression close to a symphonic poem rather than a concert.

The ensemble responsibility between the conductor and the pianist is of particular importance here, since the stability of the tempo, the gradual construction of dynamic growth, and the logical development of the culminating points depend on the mutual breathing of the two performers. It is required that the fortissimo chords played by the pianist do not dominate the orchestral tutti, but are located in accordance with its timbral mass; otherwise the overall acoustic balance will be disturbed. At the same time, the conductor, taking into account the agogic freedom of the fortepiano part, ensures symphonic integrity by clearly introducing the orchestral groups and controlling the dynamic range. The wide dynamic range in the introduction – sharp transitions from pianissimo to fortissimo – increases the dramatic tension and sets the main ideological direction of the work.

From a musicological point of view, this introduction is not directly repeated thematically in subsequent sections, but its intonational core and heroic pathos are preserved as a dramatic backdrop throughout the concerto. Thus, through this introduction, Tchaikovsky simultaneously expresses the solemnity and inner anguish of the human psyche, and interprets the soloist and the orchestra as complementary, not competing, dramatic forces. This is considered a high example of ensemble culture in the Romantic concert genre.

Tchaikovsky was a frequent guest in the Ukrainian village of Kamenka, where he personally listened to local folk songs and performances by blind lyre players and wrote them down. Researchers have determined that the famous “Introduction” theme in the first part of the concerto is very close in intonation to a historical song called “Oy, kryache, kryache ta chorny voron” sung by Ukrainian blind musicians, or to the specific melodies of the lyre players, as described in scientific sources.

Musicologists believe that this famous theme is genetically related to Ukrainian folk songs, in particular, the songs of blind lyre players (the lyre motif). Tchaikovsky took

a small intonational element of a folk melody and turned it into a universal artistic image, thereby demonstrating the epic scope of Russian musical romanticism.

In musicology and ethnography, the issue of the genetic and typological connection between the “Blind” songs and the traditions of lyre players has deep scientific foundations, and this is manifested not only in the style of performance, but also as a socio-cultural phenomenon. Historically, the institute of blind musicians has formed a separate spiritual layer in the vastness of Eurasia, and the similarity between the “lyre players” of Eastern Europe and the epic poets of the East is directly related to their way of perceiving the inner world. From a scientific point of view, the melodic structure, called the “lyre motif”, is distinguished by a limited vocal range and recitative, that is, speech-like performance, which is in harmony with the narrative and meditative character of the “Blind” songs. The genetic connection here does not mean biological inheritance, but the common roots of traditional musical thinking, and in both directions music is interpreted as a product of divine revelation and inner vision. In particular, the bourdon resonance characteristic of the lyre, that is, the continuity of the lower background tone, creates a musical-structural similarity with the resonance of the open strings in the performance of the dombira or soz in the art of bakhshi. Researchers explain this connection by the transnational nature of the culture of wandering musicians, since the repertoire of blind musicians is usually philosophical, religious and epic in content, and their singing manner is aimed at evoking a strong psychological impact and a melancholic mood in the listener. Therefore, the claims that the songs of “Blind” are related to the motifs of the lyre are not just speculation, but a scientific fact based on the universal laws of musical language and the unique artistic world of blind artists.

At the very beginning of the first movement, the “calling” intonation of the powerful sounds of the orchestra (horns) succeeds in revealing the essence of the work, while at the same time awakening a sense of vitality and heroic spirit in the listener. Then, against the background of the piano’s extensive, chordal

tuning, a majestic theme is introduced, performed by the violin and cello group.

An interesting and scientifically important point is that this grandiose introductory theme is not repeated throughout the work, but its inner energy and intonational “seeds” have a hidden influence on the development of subsequent themes. This introduction remains one of the most vivid symbols of the infinite beauty of life and the triumph of human will in musical thought. As Yuri Keldysh noted, this work is the first perfect example of a professional combination of national traditions in Russian music with the classical criteria of the Western European concert genre.

In musicology, it is a fundamental fact that the famous theme in the opening of this concerto was based on the song of blind lyre players heard in the Ukrainian city of Kamenka, which is expressed in the monograph of A. A. Alshwang as follows: “The main theme of the first movement captivates with its majestic scale; it was taken by Tchaikovsky from the song of Ukrainian lyre players heard in Kamenka. The composer was able to ingeniously transform an ordinary everyday melody into a monumental symphonic declaration” (Alshwang A. A., 1970, p. 234).

BV Asafev develops this idea in his book, writing about the inner nature of these songs: “The intonational construction of the concerto goes back to the deep layers of folk performance; here the image of the blind Bakhshishozanda is a symbol of inner vision (insight) and epic memory” (Asafev B. V., 1972).

In Western musicology, and particularly in English, fundamental research has focused on the musical transformation of this subject. In particular, David Brown (Brown, D., 1983, 312) describes the origin of the melody in his work as follows: “The famous opening theme is based on a tune that Tchaikovsky heard performed by blind beggars (lyre-players) wandering around the market in Kamenka. Although the original folk tune was in duple time, Tchaikovsky transformed it into a soaring triple-meter melody of unparalleled power.”

Jeremy Norris also assesses the composer’s approach to folk music in his book as follows: “Tchaikovsky did not simply quote the “Lirnitsky” motif; he extracted the ge-

netic melodic essence of the melody to create a structural bridge between folk traditions and the high art of the concert genre” (Norris, J., 1994, 224).

Finally, the connection between the composer’s personal psychological state and the choice of this tune is explained by Alexander Poznansky in his work: “The appeal of the Blind Singers’ Tune lay not only in its exotic (unusual) nature, but also in the deep sense of loneliness and isolation that it conveyed, which was in harmony with Tchaikovsky’s personal inner struggles in the mid-1870s.” All these quotes unanimously confirm that the Blind Tunes are not only a decorative element of Concerto No. 1, but also the main genetic source that forms its entire ideological and intonational foundation (Poznansky, A., 1991, 679).

As musicologist A. Alshwang noted, since Tchaikovsky raised a simple everyday tune to the level of a “symphonic declaration”, the performers must also understand the inner melancholy and “epic memory” inherent in blind musicians under this musical solemnity and grandeur. The responsibility of the ensemble is manifested precisely at this point: the conductor must establish a balance between the mournful chords of the orchestra and the free expression of the soloist, and the pianist must continue the monumental breath of the orchestra and convey to the listener the human experiences that form the ideological foundation of the work. Such a responsible approach ensures not only the technical perfection of the work, but also allows for the full coverage of the main theme of the composer’s intention – the invincible power of the human spirit and its connection with the spiritual roots of the people.

The composer’s “Piano Concerto No. 1 in B minor, Op. 23” is a high example of ensemble culture, combining the traditions of the classical concert genre with the principles of romantic symphonism. In this work, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky transforms the usual model of “competition” between soloist and orchestra into the principle of symphonic cooperation; as a result, the piano part performs not only a virtuoso solo function, but also the role of a dramaturgical participant on an equal footing with the orchestral texture.

While in classical concerts (especially in the tradition of Mozart and Beethoven) the

dialogue between soloist and orchestra is based more on the principle of opposition and alternation, in Tchaikovsky symphonic thinking takes precedence. Already in the introduction, the orchestra presents a broad heroic theme, and the piano joins the general dramaturgical process by providing harmonic support and textural enrichment. This brings the concert genre to a symphonic scale and ensures the integrity of the ensemble.

The thematic development, tonal dramaturgy, and orchestration techniques in the work exhibit all the hallmarks of romantic symphony: a wide dynamic range, contrasting characters, inner spiritual drama, and culminating development. In this respect, Concerto No. 1 is considered not only an example of virtuoso pianism, but also a large-scale ensemble work built on symphonic thinking.

Conclusion

Piano Concerto No. 1 in B minor, Op. 23, stands out as a work that marked a fundamental turning point in the evolution of the concert genre of the Romantic period. In this concert, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky reinterprets the principle of the “soloist-orchestra” opposition characteristic of the classical concert genre, rebuilding it on the basis of symphonic thinking. As a result, the solo part in the work is formed not only as a virtuoso performing tool, but also as an active and equal subject of general symphonic development.

The analysis shows that the dramaturgical integrity of the concert is ensured by the intonational core of the heroic theme in the opening and is developed throughout the cycle through motivic and tonal transformations. The free interpretation of the sonata-allegro form, the expansion of tonal planning, and the priority of symphonic development methods confirm the deep penetration of the aesthetics of romantic symphonism into the concert genre.

Also, the work’s delicate system of ensemble balance, agogic flexibility, and dynamic contrasts requires a high level of artistic thinking from the performers and creative cooperation between the soloist and the conductor. Therefore, this concerto can be considered not only one of the peaks of

the romantic piano repertoire, but also an important artistic and aesthetic event that clearly demonstrates the process of symphonization of the concert genre.

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